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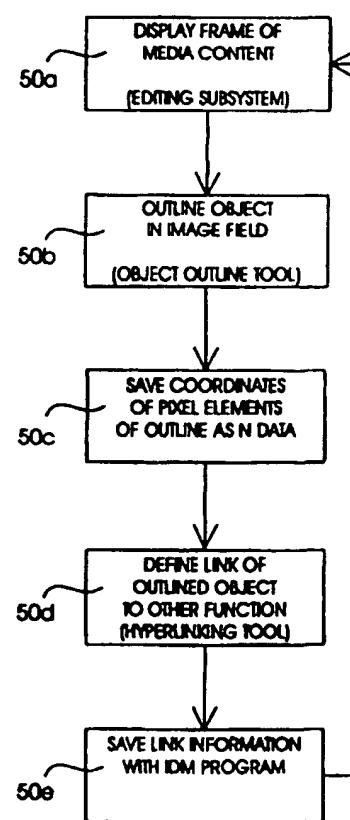
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(54) Title: **SYSTEM FOR USING MEDIA CONTENT IN INTERACTIVE DIGITAL MEDIA PROGRAM**

(57) Abstract

A system for allowing media content to be used in an interactive digital media (IDM) program has Frame Data for the media content and object mapping data (N Data) representing the frame addresses and display location coordinates for objects appearing in the media content (50). The N Data are maintained separately from the Frame Data for the media content (fig. 2). The IDM program has established linkages connecting the objects mapped by the N Data to other functions to be performed in conjunction with display of the media content (41). Selection of an object appearing in the media content with a pointer results in initiation of the interactive function (44). An authoring system for creating IDM program has an object outlining tool (51b) and an object motion tracking tool (51d) for facilitating the generation of N Data. In a data storage disk, the Frame Data and the N Data are stored on separate sectors (60). In a network system, the object mapping data and IDM program are downloaded to a subscriber terminal and used in conjunction with presentation of the media content (30).



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SPECIFICATION

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SYSTEM FOR USING MEDIA CONTENT IN INTERACTIVE DIGITAL MEDIA PROGRAMField of the Invention

10 This invention relates to the field of interactive digital media systems, and particularly to a system for using media content in an interactive digital media program.

Background Art

15 Technological development is fostering an increasing convergence of television, multimedia programming, and computers. The creation of a world-wide information infrastructure will support the viewing of motion pictures, multimedia programs, and newscast events on demand. It will provide access to telecommunications networks, 20 databases, and information services over long distances, as well as facilitate the instantaneous exchanging of governmental, business, research, institutional, medical, and personal data, and teleconferencing and sharing of documents and information among organizations, workgroups, and individuals spread out over wide areas. The entry point for users 25 to this information infrastructure is principally the interactive use of a visual display interface to the system.

Content is essential to the value users derive from use of the system. While much of the content being offered is newly created to take advantage of the latest developments in technology, there is a vast 30 base of existing content that is non-interactive which users may desire to have access to, particularly media content in the form of movies, videos, video advertising, television programming, etc. However, if existing media content is merely offered as a digitized equivalent of its existing form, then there is little or no value added over obtaining the 35 same content through the current media in which it is offered. The conversion of existing media content to interactive digital media adds value by rendering it capable of interactivity and linking to other forms of digital media.

The conversion of media content to interactive digital media

use has heretofore been a laborious process as conversion tools have required developers to perform conversion tasks essentially manually. Many types of hyperlinking tools have been developed for rendering text and graphics materials "live" for interactive use, e.g., as discussed in

5 5 Multimedia and Hypertext, edited by Jakob Nielson, published by Academic Press, Inc., 1995. Typically, a link is created between a word, phrase, icon, image, or other object appearing in the display to another text file (hypertext) or to another program or media function (hypermedia) to deepen the user's engagement in the system. Thus, when a user clicks

10 10 with a pointing device such as a mouse on an object appearing in the screen display, an interactive media program will pull up another file or perform another function so as to provide the user with further information, response, or options. A series of hyperlinks may be followed to allow the user to pursue a subject to any desired depth or

15 15 relational complexity. Such hyperlinking tools have found valuable use for online documentation, user assistance, interactive manuals, graphical operating systems, information retrieval, auditing and tracking systems, authoring systems, games, audiovisual programs, edutainment programs, etc.

20 20 However, conventional hyperlinking tools require the developer to embed linking codes or "anchors" manually in the content file which is to be rendered interactive. For example, if the content is a voluminous collection of "pages" to be displayed to the user, such as for an electronic encyclopedia, then conversion would require a large

25 25 amount of time for the developer to embed hyperlinking codes around each text object for each page of content. A current candidate for a universal language for marking documents and embedding hyperlinking codes is called Standard Generalized Markup Language (SGML). A multimedia extension to SGML known as HyTime has been accepted by the International

30 30 Standards Organization (ISO) for marking of documents which may incorporate audio and video media. However, even when such hyperlinking tools are used for media content, such as a digitized video sequence, the marking of the sequence for "live" interactive use is currently accomplished by embedding hyperlinking codes around the object in each

35 35 frame of the sequence (typically 30 frames per second for full motion sequence).

Digital video editing tools have also been developed for painting, coloring, sizing, altering, or otherwise editing still and motion images, compositing multiple images, text, and sound tracks

together, animating and morphing images, compressing multimedia files for storage or transmission, etc. However, almost all such digital media editing tools require alteration of the underlying raw content file in order to create a new digital media content file. In most cases, 5 conventional editing tools embed proprietary codes or use proprietary file formats to modify or re-specify an existing content file. As a result, the edited media file can only be run on compatible systems or platforms that have complementary display, playback, or decompression tools.

10

Summary of the Invention

It is therefore a principal object of the present invention to provide a system for allowing media content, particularly a broad base of existing media content, to be used as interactive digital media 15 programs. A specific object is to render media content to interactive use without locking it in to any particular system or platform, i.e., without embedding proprietary codes in the original media content. It is a further object to provide an authoring system for developing interactive digital media programs from media content using automated 20 tools which can reduce the development time.

In accordance with the main object of the present invention, a system for allowing media content to be used as an interactive digital media program comprises: (a) media content in the form of digital data representing a series of successive display frames having respective 25 frame addresses ("Frame Data"); (b) object mapping data ("N Data") specifying display location coordinates of objects intended to be interactive as they appear in the display frames of the media content; (c) linkages provided through an interactive digital media (IDM) program from the objects whose display location coordinates are specified by the 30 N Data to respective other functions to be performed upon user selection of the objects in conjunction with display of the media content; and (d) a user system for operating the IDM program in conjunction with the 35 display of the media content by detecting when an object appearing in one or more display frames is selected by a user and performing the function linked by the IDM program linkage thereto.

In accordance with the specific object of the invention, the N Data representing the display location coordinates and frame addresses of mapped objects are maintained separately from the Frame Data for the media content. The media content is thus kept intact and uncorrupted by

any embedded special codes, so that it can be run (played) on any media system or platform. The N Data are preferably in a standard format so that they can be widely used in the creation of many types and varieties of IDM programs.

- 5 In accordance with a further object of the invention, an authoring system comprises an editing subsystem for editing media content in the form of digital data representing a series of successive display frames having respective frame addresses ("Frame Data"); (b) an object mapping subsystem for generating object mapping data ("N Data")
- 10 specifying display location coordinates of objects intended to be interactive as they appear in the display frames of the media content; (c) interactive digital media (IDM) program development tools including a hyperlinking tool for establishing linkages from objects whose display location coordinates are specified by the N Data to other functions to
- 15 be performed upon user selection of the objects in conjunction with display of the media content; and (d) said object mapping subsystem having an object mapping tool for generating the display location coordinates for an object appearing in a display frame when an author marks the object as it appears in a display frame. The object mapping
- 20 subsystem further includes an object motion tracking tool for generating the display location coordinates for an object in motion based upon an author marking an object as it appears in one display frame and detection of the marked object over subsequent frames of a series of display frames.
- 25 In a preferred network system, media content in the form of movies, videos, and the like, is used with an interactive digital media (IDM) program by downloading the Frame Data for the movie and the N Data for designated "hot spots" appearing therein from a network server to a subscriber terminal upon request. An IDM program selected for the movie
- 30 is also downloaded from the server or, alternatively, is loaded by the subscriber in the terminal. The subscriber terminal runs the IDM program in conjunction with display of the movie and performs the hyperlinked functions specified in the IDM program whenever the subscriber clicks on a "hot spot" appearing in the movie, such as with a remote control
- 35 pointer. Thus, the previously non-interactive movie is rendered as interactive entertainment to the subscriber.

A related aspect of the invention is a disk storage format for storing the Frame Data and the N Data. The Frame Data for the media content is stored physically or logically separate from the N Data for

the designated objects. The disk preferably has a main sector where the Frame Data are stored, and a smaller, outermost sector where the N Data is stored. With this format, movie or video disks having the N Data recorded in the outermost sector can still be played in conventional 5 player systems which can only playback the movie and cannot use the N Data.

The present invention is described in greater detail below, together with its further objectives, features and advantages, in conjunction with the following drawings:

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Brief Description of the Drawings

Fig. 1 is a schematic drawing showing the conversion of original media content to digital frame data.

15 Fig. 2 is a schematic drawing showing the generation of object mapping data designating "hot spots" in a display frame.

Fig. 3 is a schematic drawing showing the transmission of digital data for the original media content and object mapping data for objects therein from a network server to a subscriber terminal.

20 Fig. 4 is a schematic diagram of the components of a subscriber terminal for use in conjunction with an interactive digital media program.

Fig. 5A is a procedural diagram for an object mapping tool for generating N Data for objects in a display frame, Fig. 5B is a procedural diagram for an object motion tracking tool for generating N 25 Data for objects in motion over a sequence of display frames, and Fig. 5c illustrates use of the mapping and motion tracking tools for automatically generating N Data for an object in motion.

Fig. 6 is a schematic illustration of a disk storage format for recording media content data with object mapping data for an 30 interactive digital media program.

Detailed Description of the Invention

Multimedia systems have evolved to sophisticated systems today that can support photographic quality resolution (1280 x 1024 35 pixels), millions of colors on a display screen, high-fidelity audio, large-scale storage and retrieval of still and full-motion video, large-scale arrays of memory storage, plug-and-play interfaces to multimedia devices, and high-capacity network linkages that can support digital video and videoconferencing from desktop systems. For an overview of

hardware and software technologies developed for multimedia systems, reference is made to Multimedia Systems, edited by Jessica Keyes, published by Mc-Graw Hill, Inc., 1994.

The rapid technological advances of the last decade have made 5 digital full-motion video available on today's desktop systems. In the next decade, advanced network technologies and integrated multimedia distribution systems will permit full-motion video with high-fidelity audio to be delivered on demand to offices and homes virtually anywhere in the world. Such advanced systems and the possibilities for their use 10 are described in Interactive Television: A Comprehensive Guide for Multimedia Technologies, by Winston W. Hodge, published by McGraw-Hill, Inc., 1995. For such future, and even current, multimedia systems, a high demand will be placed on being able to make interactive use of the huge base of existing content, particularly media content such as movies, 15 videos, and television programming.

It is projected that a primary scenario for delivery of video-on-demand (VOD) in the future will be through an office workstation or an interactive television set at home connected via cable, fiber, or other high-bandwidth link to network servers of a media services company 20 for a local area. The interactive television set is expected to have an advanced set-top box for handling subscribers' requests and uses of interactive media services. Principal services which customers are expected to ask for include program and viewing time selection, order placing, menu navigation, home shopping, interactive games, random scenes 25 selection, TV set controls, and subscriber billing review. For simplicity and ease of use, the television and set-top box should be controlled by a simple remote device which will include a light-beam pointer for pointing to menu choices, icons, windows, photographs, and other objects of interest appearing on the screen. A primary application 30 of the present invention is to facilitate the conversion of non-interactive media content to interactive digital media use by establishing remote-controllable objects or "hot spots" on the television screen display for user selection.

A basic concept of the invention is the mapping of objects 35 in digital media presentations as "hot spots" without embedding any special codes in the original digital media content. This is accomplished by specifying the display location coordinates of selected objects within a frame or series of frames of a display and their frame addresses. The display location coordinates and frame addresses of the

"hot spots" are stored as data that are physically or at least logically separate from the media content. This allows the original media content to be accessed and run on any system without having to handle proprietary or platform-dependent codes. The coordinate/address data of the "hot spots" are preferably in a standard format that can be accessed by any interactive digital media (IDM) program written to run with that media presentation. When the media content is played with the IDM program, a user can select "hot spots" appearing in the display to trigger further developments. The IDM program responds to user selection of "hot spots" by launching further layers of display presentations and/or triggering other program functions, such as launching another application, initiating the operation of another system, or connecting to an external network such as a World Wide Web™ page or service on the Internet.

The following description of the invention focuses primarily on the mapping and use of "hot spots" appearing in the visual display of a digital media presentation. However, it should be understood that a "hot spot" can be any object identifiable in any type of digital presentation, including a sound or music segment or even a bodily response in virtual reality systems.

20

Interactive Digital Media System Overview

In a basic implementation of the invention, as illustrated in Fig. 1, original media content 10, such as a movie, video program, or live television program captured by a video camera, etc., is digitized via an analog-to-digital (A/D) converter 12 into digital data representing a series of display frames $F_i, F_{i+1}, F_{i+2}, \dots$, in a time sequence t for display on a display screen. Each frame F has a frame address $i, i+1, i+2, \dots$ corresponding to its unique time position in the sequence, and is composed of an array of pixels p_i uniquely defined by location coordinates represented by j rows and k columns in the display area of each frame. The pixels of the frame are also digitally defined with chrominance and luminance values representing their color and brightness levels on the display. For full motion video, a sequence of 30 frames is typically used per second of video. Each frame is composed of an array of pixels forming the display at the screen's given resolution, e.g., 640 x 480 pixels at a typical VGA resolution, or 1280 x 1024 at a higher SVGA resolution. Color resolution at a high 24-bit level may also be used. Thus, for a desktop system using a 32-bit internal data bus, and depending on whether and what data compression

scheme is used, full motion video of 30 frames per second at full color, SVGA resolution can have a digital data stream from about 250 KBytes to 1.2 MBytes per second.

In Fig. 2, an individual frame is illustrated showing an image of an object A such as a face next to an object B such as the sun. In interactive use, the user can point at (click on) the face A or the sun B to connect to further information or a further development in the story being presented. In accordance with the invention, the original media content is converted to interactive use without embedding special codes in the digital data for the frames, by mapping the "hot spots" as separate data which are used in an interactive digital media program associated with the media content. Thus, for the frame F_i , a "hot spot" area $A'(F_i)$ is mapped for the object A, and a "hot spot" area $B'(F_i)$ is mapped for the object B. The definition of a "hot spot" can be made by defining a set of pixels in the display which comprise an outline around the designated area, e.g., $p(a_j, a_k) \dots$. Alternatively, the area may be defined by a vector contour encompassing the designated area, or any other suitable array definition method as is well known in the computer graphics field. The display location coordinates of the defined pixels and the frame addresses of the frames in which the area appears are stored separately as object mapping data.

The original media content is thus rendered in the form of a stream of digital data, referred to herein as "Frame Data", which represent the series of display frames F constituting the movie or video sequence. Concurrently, for each frame F_i , the object mapping data, referred to herein as "N Data", are generated to define the display location coordinates of designated "hot spot" areas in the frames of the movie or video sequence. In accordance with a basic principle of the invention, the N Data mapping the "hot spots" are maintained as physically or at least logically separate data from the Frame Data for the media content. For example, the Frame Data and the N Data may be recorded as physically separate sectors on a video laserdisk or CD, or may be stored as logically separate data files in the memory storage of a video server. In this manner, the objects which are rendered interactive in the original media content are tagged for use in a compatible interactive digital media (IDM) program without embedding any proprietary or platform-dependent codes in the media content. Thus, the media content data can be run on any digital media player and the N Data can be used by any IDM program.

The N Data defining the "hot spots" are preferably in a standard industry format for the frame addresses and display location coordinates for the designated objects, as explained further herein. The standard-format N Data can thus be accessed by any interactive digital media (IDM) program written in standard applications programming languages. In accordance with the invention, the N Data define the location of the designated "hot spots" or "anchors" to which hyperlinks are established in the IDM program. This is represented in Fig. 2 by "IDM PROG." which references the "hot spot" N Data values as anchors for hyperlinks to other files or executable functions ("GO TO ..."). Then when a user clicks on a designated "hot spot" by pointing to any display position encompassed within the area defined by the object mapping data, the IDM program recognizes that the object pointed to has been selected, and consequently causes the other file or function linked to the "hot spot" to be performed.

Running Media Content and IDM Program from Network Server

Interactive digital media programs in accordance with the invention can be run on any of a wide range of platforms. In large media service networks, the media content, N Data, and associated IDM programs are downloaded via the network to user or subscriber terminals upon request. For individual use, the programs are loaded via peripheral devices into personal computers, game players, or other media playing consoles. The following description focuses on the delivery of media content and IDM programs through networks, such as cable TV, telephone networks, digital line and fiber optic networks, and wide area digital networks. In the future, the prevalence of network delivery of interactive media services is expected to increase greatly toward a paradigm often referred to as the "multimedia revolution".

An example of network delivery of interactive digital media programs in accordance with the invention is shown schematically in Fig. 3. Typically, a network server 30 provides media services from a node or hub in a company's service area. The server 30 is coupled to subscriber terminals through a suitable data transmission link DL, such as cable wiring, fiber optic lines, telephone wiring, or digital data links. The subscriber's terminal is typically in the form of a "set-top" box 32 connected to the subscribers' TV or screen display 34, but it can also be a computer or other type of terminal. An important concept for network media services is "video-on-demand", wherein the server 30 can

access large digital libraries of movies, videos, and other types of media content and transmit them to subscribers upon request. The server 30 transmits both the Frame Data for the media content and the N Data and IDM program for rendering the "hot spots" therein interactive to the 5 subscriber's set-top box 32 via the data transmission link DL. The subscriber uses a remote control device 36 to operate the set. For interactive use, the remote device 36 includes an optical pointer which emits an infrared or other light beam. As known conventionally, a sensor 33 in the set-top box is used to detect the position and angle of the 10 beam from the remote control pointer in order to detect the area of the display 34 being pointed to.

The media content with N Data delivered to the subscriber is operated interactively by the subscriber through the IDM program. The IDM program can be a dedicated program indexed to N Data which are 15 specific to a single type of interactive use of the media content. Alternatively, a production studio or studio library which owns the media content property may find it more effective to publish a complete listing of N Data for an owned property which includes a mapping of all "hot spots" likely to be of interest for interactive programs. IDM program 20 writers can then use the published listing of N Data to create many and more diverse program offerings for a particular media content property. For dedicated IDM programs, the IDM program data can be stored together with the N Data in association with the media content and transmitted together by the server 30 to the subscriber's terminal. For multi-use 25 IDM programs, the N Data can be stored in association with the media content and transmitted from the server 30, while subscribers can choose any IDM program they wish to play from a publishing or retail outlet and load it into their terminals via a peripheral device provided with or connected to their set-top box 32, such as a CD-ROM drive or a ROM card 30 insertion slot.

Fig. 4 illustrates schematically how an interactive digital media system uses the media content Frame Data, N Data, and the IDM program together to provide interactive entertainment. The system includes the aforementioned set-top box 32, display 34, remote control 35 pointer 36, and data link DL to the external network server. An on-board CD-ROM player or other data reading device 43 may be provided with the set-top box 32 for input of data, indicated at 45, such as by loading from a selected CD or insertable disk or card. Input from the remote control pointer 36 is detected by the sensor 33 on the set-top box and

processed to determine its target via a pointer detection circuit 44.

In the principal mode of use, the subscriber inputs a request to the service company for an interactive media program through the set-top box 32, using an on-board keypad 42 or through menu selection by 5 using the remote control pointer 36. For example, the subscriber can request the interactive program "Movie Trivia Info" for the movie "The Maltese Falcon". This interactive program will run the movie while displaying pop-up movie trivia about the stars Humphrey Bogart, Sidney Greenstreet, and Peter Lorre or objects such as the Maltese falcon 10 whenever the user clicks on these "hot spots" appearing in different scenes of the film. To the user, movie viewing which had been a passive experience is rendered interactive so that the user can play trivia games or spark conversations in conjunction with the running of the movie.

A console processor 40 for the set-top box processes the 15 subscriber request and transmits it via the data link DL to the network server 30. In return, the server 30 first transmits the IDM program data for "Movie Trivia Info" and the N Data for the movie to the subscriber's set-top box where the console processor 40 operates to store the data in a console RAM memory 46. The console processor 40 can load and run the 20 IDM program as a multi-tasking function concurrently with other console functions, as indicated in Fig. 4 by the separate module 41. Alternatively, the IDM program can run on a separate processor (41) in parallel with the console processor.

The remote downloading and playing of games and other types 25 of interactive programs can be used even with conventional cable TV networks which do not presently have a two-way data link DL between server and subscribers. In an example for video games, the cable company broadcasts modulated signals for the game data on a dedicated cable channel. In response to a subscriber's telephone request, the cable 30 company transmits a signal enabling the subscriber's converter box to receive the data. The game data is then demodulated through a modem connector and downloaded to the subscriber's game player. For purposes of the present invention, this would allow loading of the IDM program and N Data in the game player. The game player can now operate the IDM 35 program in conjunction with the media content, as described next.

After the IDM program is loaded, the network server 30 begins to transmit the movie as digital Frame Data to the subscriber's set-top box 32. The Frame Data is routed by the console processor 40 to the video processor 48 and associated video RAM memory 50 which process the

display of frames of the movie via video display output 49 to the subscriber's television 34. Audio processing is subsumed with the video processing and is not shown separately. For typical video-on-demand servers, a requested movie can be transmitted to the subscriber as a 5 series of 30-second movie blocks within a 6-minute start of a request. The video processor coordinates the receipt of the blocks of transmitted data into a display of video output which the user sees as a continuous movie.

As designed for interactive video systems, the remote control 10 36 includes an optical pointer for digitally pointing to objects displayed on the television screen. As the movie runs, the user can point the remote control pointer 36 to a designated actor or object appearing on the television display and click on the desired object. The N Data for the movie defines the area encompassing the object as a "hot 15 spot". Clicking the pointer results in the target's display location coordinates being detected by the pointer detector module 44. The target's coordinates are input via the console processor 40 to the IDM program running concurrently with the movie. As indicated at box 41a, the IDM program compares the target's coordinates to the N Data mapping 20 of "hot spots" stored in memory to identify when a "hot spot" has been selected, and then executes the response programmed by the hyperlink established for that "hot spot", as indicated at box 41b.

For example, the hyperlinked response may be to display trivia information about the actor or object clicked on. The IDM module 25 retrieves the trivia information stored with the IDM program in memory and sends it to the console processor 40 to process a pop-up window, overlay display, audio track, etc., in conjunction with the movie. To illustrate, upon the user clicking on the Maltese falcon, the hyperlink established in the "Movie Trivia Info" program can initiate a linked 30 display of text or graphics explaining the Maltese origins of the falcon in a pop-up window on the television screen, or may execute another program function such as initiating an Internet connection to a World Wide Web™ service which offers a replica of the falcon for purchase. In this manner, unlimited types and varieties of interactive actions can be 35 activated for existing movies, videos, and other media content.

As an option, upon selection by a user clicking on an object, the IDM program can issue an instruction via the console processor 40 to the video processor 48 to slow down or pause the running of the movie to allow time for the user to absorb the IDM program response.

Alternatively, the user may wish to bypass the response and store it to be reviewed after the movie is finished. By input from the remote control pointer 36 (e.g., clicking on a displayed "Save" button), the particular scene location and clicked object and/or its linked response 5 can be saved in the console RAM 46 for retrieval during a Review mode of the IDM program, as indicated at box 41c in Fig. 4.

Authoring and Mapping of "Hot Spots" As N Data

The mapping of "hot spots" or objects appearing in original 10 media content to enable the operation of an interactive digital media (IDM) program is an important aspect of the present invention. In the production of an IDM program, the initial work of creating linkages between words, graphic images, objects, and/or scenes of a movie or video sequence to other interactive functions is referred to as "authoring". 15 An author typically works on a workstation using editing and hyperlinking software provided with various tools for working with particular media. An example of authoring software for multimedia programs is the PREMIERTM multimedia development system sold by Adobe Systems, Inc., of Mountain View, California. Such an authoring system is typically provided with 20 editing tools which can be adapted as "hot spot" mapping tools for authoring IDM programs in accordance with the present invention.

Technology for mapping objects appearing in a display frame has been developed in the fields of interactive program development as well as for video editing. For example, the LINKSWARETM hypertext 25 development software offered by LinksWare Company, of Monterey, California, allows an author to click on a word or phrase in a text document and create a hyperlink to another file, and to store the linking information separate from the document itself. Video editing software sold under the name ELASTIC REALITY 3TM by Elastic Reality, Inc., of 30 Madison, Wisconsin, has shape creation and compositing tools which can outline a shape in an image field and store the shape data as a separate file.

The above described tools which are currently available can be adapted to the purposes of the present invention for authoring an IDM 35 program by mapping "hot spots" in a media presentation. That is, using a shape outlining tool similar to that offered in the ELASTIC REALITY 3TM software, an object A as shown in Fig. 2 can be outlined with a cursor, and the display coordinate addresses for the pixel elements of the outlined shape can be stored in a separate file as object mapping data.

Consequently, a hyperlinking tool similar to that offered in the LINKSWARE™ software is used to establish programmed hyperlinks of the object mapping data to other program functions which provide the IDM program with its interactive responses. The details of use of such 5 editing and hyperlinking tools is considered to be within the realm of conventional technical ability and is not described in further detail herein.

An example of a procedural sequence for using an object mapping tool in an authoring system is shown in the diagram of Fig. 5A.

10 First, a display frame of the media content is called up on the editing subsystem, as indicated at box 50a. Using an outlining tool similar to that provided in the ELASTIC REALITY 3™ software, the author can draw an outline around an object in the image field using a pointer or other cursor device, as indicated at box 50b. The outline, i.e., the display 15 location coordinates of the pixel elements constituting the outline, and the frame address are saved as N Data at box 50c. Then using a hyperlinking tool similar to that provided in the LINKSWARE™ software, the author can define a hyperlink between the object outlined, now specified as N Data, and another function to be performed by the IDM 20 program; as indicated at box 50d. The hyperlink information is saved with the IDM program at box 50e. The procedure is iterated for all objects to be mapped in a frame and for all frames of the movie or video. The IDM program can be stored together with the N Data or separately, depending upon whether the N Data is for dedicated use or multi-use.

25 The object mapping function can use the same outline data of one frame for succeeding frames if the object appears in the same position in the other frames, i.e., is non-moving. This saves the author from having to draw the same outline in the other frames. Even further, the outline data of a non-moving object appearing in a first frame can 30 be stored with only the frame address of the last frame in a sequence in which the object appears unchanged in order to compress the N Data required to map the object over the sequence of frames. The IDM program can later uncompress the N Data and use the same outline data for the sequence of frames.

35 In accordance with a further development of the present invention, the object mapping procedures can include a motion tracking tool for automatically generating N Data for an unchanging object in motion across a sequence of frames. It will be appreciated that the mapping of a number of "hot spots" in each frame of a full motion video

sequence or movie which may run from a few minutes to a few hours duration can be a hugely laborious task. Motion tracking and motion estimating techniques have been developed recently which can be adapted for a motion tracking tool to be used in the invention. For example, a 5 motion tracking program named ASSET-2 developed by Stephen M. Smith at the U.K. Defense Research Agency, Chertsey, Surrey, U.K., uses feature segmentation and clustering techniques to produce an abstracted cluster representation of objects in successive frames of a video sequence. Using statistical comparisons, a cluster characterized by a similar set 10 of features appearing at different positions in a path across a series of frames can be recognized as an object in motion. The object can then be tracked to varying degrees depending upon the sophistication of the particular applications program, such as for traffic monitoring, target acquisition, etc. At the simplest level, an object in motion is detected 15 if it is unchanging, i.e., is not rotating or being occluded by other objects in three-dimensional view. With more advanced techniques, the object can be recognized if it retains some recognized features while rotating or moving behind another object. A general description of motion tracking or motion estimating techniques is given in Machine 20 Vision, by R. Jain, R. Katsuri, and B. Schunck, published by McGraw-Hill, Inc., New York, New York, 1995.

Another motion estimating technique is one used for compression of video images. MPEG-2 is a video compression standard developed by the Motion Pictures Expert Group, a committee of the 25 International Standards Organization (ISO). MPEG-2 uses interframe predictive coding to identify pixel sectors which are invariant over a series of frames in order to remove the invariant image data in subsequent frames for data compression purposes. A general description of MPEG-2 and motion estimating techniques is given in Digital 30 Compression of Still Images and Video, by Roger Clarke, published by Academic Press, Inc., San Diego, California, 1995.

The above described motion tracking techniques are adapted to the present invention to automate the generation of N Data for objects in motion in a movie or video sequence. An example of a procedural 35 sequence for using a motion tracking tool in an authoring system is shown in the diagram of Fig. 5B. First, a display frame of the media content is called up on the editing subsystem, as indicated at box 51a. Using an outlining tool as before, the author draws an outline around an object and marks its position as it appears in a first or "key" frame, as

indicated at box 51b. The outline data, position, and frame address are saved as N Data at box 51c. Then, a motion tracking tool similar to the ASSET-2 system of the U.K. Defense Research Agency or the MPEG-2 motion estimating technique is used to detect the image of the object as it 5 moves across subsequent frames at box 51d, until a last frame in which the object is detected is reached. The position of the object and frame address of the last frame in the sequence are then saved as N Data at box 51e. The use of the motion tracking tool saves the author from having to draw the outline around the object in each frame of the sequence, and 10 also compresses the amount of N Data required to specify the mapping of the object in those frames.

The use of the motion tracking tool for N Data generation in accordance with the present invention is illustrated in Fig. 5C. The author first brings up on the workstation a key frame F_{Ki} of a series of 15 frames in a full motion movie or video sequence. Using a mouse or other type of pointing device 52, the author delineates an object in the key frame, such as the airplane shown in frame F_{Ki} , by drawing an outline OL around the airplane. The author also marks the position of the object in the key frame by designating a marker MK in a central position within 20 the outline OL in frame F_{Ki} . The author then runs the motion tracking tool by clicking on an MT button of a tool bar 54 in a graphical interface for the authoring program. The motion tracking function operates to identify the object indicated to be within the outline OL in frame F_{Ki} where it appears in the succeeding frames of the sequence until 25 a last frame F_{Ki+N} is reached in which the object is detected. The outline data and position of the object in the key frame and the position and frame address of the last frame are stored as N Data by the authoring system.

Alternatively, the authoring system can use a conventional 30 editing tool for advancing through a sequence of frames and marking the position of the object as it moves across the frames until a last frame is reached. This allows a path P of motion to be specified in terms of the progression of positions of the marker MK for the object. For motion that follows a straight line or simple curve, the author can simply mark 35 the outline OL and the marker MK in frame F_{Ki} and mark the end position of the marker MK in a selected frame N steps removed from the key frame. Smooth motion to the human eye can be approximated well by a display of image frames at the rate of about 30 frames/second. A typical selection for the number N of frames for following an object in motion smoothly

might be an interval of 15 (0.5 second), 30 (full second), up to 60 (2 seconds) frames or more. The author thus advances to frame F_{k+1} and marks the position of the object in that frame. The path P can then be automatically filled in using a typical "in-betweening" function commonly provided in video editing software, such as the ELASTIC REALITY™ software, or a simple vector function. The outline and the path data are then stored as N Data.

With the above described object mapping and motion tracking tools, an author can readily outline a number of "hot spots" in a full motion sequence and generate N Data automatically over a series of frames. The automatic generation of N Data over extended time increments makes the mapping of objects in media content of long duration such as a two-hour movie a manageable task. When the N Data has been specified for the mapped objects, hyperlinks to other interactive functions can be readily established using conventional hypermedia authoring tools.

Distribution of Media Content and N Data

In the present invention, the N Data for marked objects are maintained as separate data from the media content so as to leave the latter uncorrupted by any embedded or proprietary codes. The IDM program with its hyperlinking information may be stored with the N Data or as a separate program depending upon whether the N Data is for dedicated use or multi-use. The transmission of media content and N Data, with or without the IDM program, has been described previously for a network. For product distribution and individual purchase, the media content and N Data (with or without the IDM program) are recorded in a unique format in a storage disk. An example of such a disk 60 is shown in Fig. 6 having a center hub 62 and an outer edge 64 with an optically readable data space 66 therebetween. Digital data for programs, sound tracks, video sequences, movies, etc., are typically stored as optically readable marks representing binary 1s and 0s in the data space 66. For media of smaller total data volume, e.g., 640 megabytes and under, the industry standard is a compact disc or CD which is written on one side. For larger data volumes up to 10 gigabytes and higher, such as for full-length movies and videos, laser disks of a larger size, and new disk formats of CD size with multiplied data density written on both sides, have been developed.

In Fig. 6, the media content data is shown stored in a large inner sector 66a, while the N Data is stored on a narrow outermost sector

66b. Isolating the N Data on the outer extremity of the disk in this way allows the disk to be used both in new players which can utilize the N Data for interactive programs, as well as in conventional players which simply playing back the non-interactive media content. The new disk 5 players for interactive media content are configured to be able to read the outer N Data sector and retrieve the N Data for use in an IDM program. If the N Data is for dedicated use, then the IDM program may also be stored with the N Data in the outermost sector 66b. Using data compression techniques as described above, the N Data for media content 10 of even a long duration can fit in a relatively small data space, thereby taking up only a small percentage of the total disk space.

Other Applications

The present invention allows the broad base of existing media 15 content in the form of presently non-interactive movies and videos to be rendered interactive through the generation of N Data that will be used in an interactive digital media program. The N Data are kept as separate data. This allows the media content to remain intact and continue to be playable in existing players. A new generation of interactive games and 20 programs can be authored using the base of existing movies and videos as media content.

The use of N Data for mapping "hot spots" in media content can also be applied to new applications for existing broadcast or cable 25 TV programming which will have increasing importance in the future. For example, advertising infomercials and home shopping shows are becoming increasingly desired and profitable. Such home shopping shows can be rendered interactive by mapping the N Data for "hot spots" of objects being displayed for sale or depicted in an advertising spot. In existing cable network systems, the N data and IDM program can be downloaded to 30 the subscriber's cable converter box through a dedicated channel as described previously.

When the infomercial or home shopping show is selected for viewing by the subscriber, a console operating system (enhanced with IDM 35 operation and pointer detection capability) uses the IDM program and N Data stored in RAM to identify which object the subscriber points to with the remote control pointer. The console operating system may also or alternatively have a stored IDM-like utility which allows it to perform certain basic functions expected for an infomercial or home shopping show, such as transaction processing or information retrieval routines

as a result of selection of objects in the display. For example, the IDM-like utility can process the display of a text file downloaded with the N Data to provide information on the price, source, contact number and/or address for a selected object, or it can store the information in

5 a user file for later review by the subscriber. If the network to which the system is connected is a digital network, the IDM-like utility may even connect to an externally executed function such as dialing and connecting to an Internet address or World Wide WebTM page to place an order for the selected object.

10 Another use for the N Data concept can be to render even standard TV programming interactive. For example, a TV program may consist of a panel of speakers or entertainers to discuss issues and act out roles in response to audience input. N Data mapping of the panelists can be downloaded to the subscriber's cable converter box or set-top box

15 prior to the running of the program. During the program, the subscriber can click with the pointer on one of the panelist, and input a question or comment via the keypad provided with the set-top box. The console, through a stored IDM-like utility downloaded with the N Data or stored on-board as part of its set, performs desired functions such as relaying

20 the text message over the cable back to the network station, where the message is then sent on to the production studio for live response by the panelists. In this manner, even the existing cable TV network system can be provided with a semblance of interactivity through the use of N Data mapping.

25 The N Data concept can also be extended to the mapping of objects in a virtual reality program. Conventional virtual reality programs are written as a single program encompassing all of its responsive effects. However, by using separate N Data mapping, a virtual reality program can be written with a media component for the scene

30 presentation, and an IDM component which uses multi-use N Data generated for the media component to call up selected types of interactive responses when the player touches or points to an object appearing in the media component. For example, the media component can play the scene presentation of "Jurassic Park", while an educational IDM component can

35 call up displays of information about various dinosaurs pointed to, or an action IDM component can call up an action response or scene changes when various dinosaurs are encountered. In this way, different types of interactive programs can be written using the same media component and N Data.

The recent development of high capacity digital video disks (DVDs) has made it possible to deliver movie-length programs in digital format on a disk of a comparable size as CD-ROMs. Recent acceptance of a standardized DVD format ensure that high-density DVDs can comfortably store two hours of MPEG-2 quality video within the 4.7 GB capacity of a single layer on a single side of the disk, compared to the traditional 680 MB capacity of the CD-ROM disk. The DVD format further provides the capability for dual-layer recording which almost doubles its storage capacity on a single side. The second disk layer may be read from either direction, i.e., inside-out or outside-in. Thus, interactive program data can be stored in the second layer in proximity to the media content stored in the first layer. The hot spot position data can be stored in an initial segment of the disk recording and read into the player control module at the beginning of playback. Thereafter, when the user clicks or points at a hot spot during playback of the media content, the DVD player need only refocus to the second layer of the disk in the same proximate position to read out the interactive program data applicable to the hot spot, thereby avoiding the need to delay the IDM sequence with seek time. The net result is instantaneous and seamless interactive play.

When media content is rendered interactive with an IDM program using "hot spot" position data, it may be desirable to stop, pause, rewind, or otherwise control the playback with familiar VCR-like controls to allow the user time to interact with the program, such as for reading information, making choices, inputting information, following a hyperlink from the hot spot, or saving a marked hot spot for later review. VCR-like controls have been developed for use with most types of multimedia systems. For example, in video-on-demand or media-on-demand systems, "streaming" content supplied in segments of digital data packets can be controlled with VCR-like controls by interrupting the content stream upon sending a command from the subscriber and rescheduling the sending of content segments as requested by the subscriber. Such video server scheduling techniques and handling of interactive requests from a video-on-demand network are described, for example, in U.S. Patent 5,528,513 to Vaitzblit et al. for prioritizing streaming content tasks, U.S. Patent 5,461,415 to Wolf et al. for grouping viewers in time to receive a common data stream and reserving a look-ahead data stream for a viewer sending a pause request, U.S. Patent 5,453,779 for resuming transmission to a viewer based upon timed

re-entry after the pause interval, and U.S. Patent 5,442,390 for storing a current program segment in the viewer's console memory and using time-indexed pointers for handling VCR-like viewing functions from the console. For multimedia systems in which streaming content is supplied 5 locally from a CD-ROM or DVD player, such VCR-like functions are handled locally with suitable player controls.

When a user clicks or points at a hot spot in streaming media content, it may be desirable to provide a "bookmark" or "frame storage" function so that the user can store the hot spot object for later review 10 and follow up. For systems in which the media content is supplied locally from a disk or other multimedia player, a bookmark function can be implemented in accordance with known techniques for storing the address of the frame and the position of the hot spot pointed to by the user, for later playback and interactive use in accordance with the IDM 15 program. For video-on-demand or media-on-demand systems, a frame storage function can be implemented with available video console memory to store the entire image frame and hot spot position in RAM for later playback and interactive use.

The same principles of marking and using hot spots in digital 20 media data can also be readily adapted to analog video programs. The frames of analog video signals can be time-addressed using the SMPTE time code synchronization protocol widely used in the television and motion picture industry. SMPTE Time Code provides a unique time address for each frame of a video signal. This address is standardized as an eight- 25 digit number based on the 24-hour clock in hours, minutes, and seconds and the video frame rate per second. There are four standard frame rates (frames per second) that apply to SMPTE Time Code: 24, 25, 30, and 30 "Drop Frame". SMPTE time code can be recorded as digital signals recorded longitudinally on a track of an audio or video tape or recording 30 media, or can be encoded in the video signal frame-by-frame during the vertical blanking interval between frames. If the SMPTE Time Code is not recorded or embedded with the video signal in playback or broadcast, it can be supplied by the production equipment or multimedia system that processes a received video signal. The IDM program data and hot spot 35 data can be supplied or downloaded to the video signal receiver prior to playback of an analog video program.

Thus, for example, interactive media programs can be supplied through existing cable TV channels by sending IDM program data and hot spot data indexed to SMPTE Time Code for the media program to an IDM-

capable console for the subscriber's TV set. The IDM program and hot spot data can be transmitted on the same cable channel prior to the media program or on a separate channel, and then used for interactive functions during the running of the media program on the given channel. The 5 interactive use of hot spots with analog cable TV signals may be limited to pop-up or text overlay effects, without being able to pause the media content or bookmark the hot spots, since analog cable TV signals are broadcast as streaming, non-interruptible content.

The hot spot authoring techniques described herein can be 10 used with any form of existing media content. As examples, pre-recorded sports programs, news telecasts, performance telecasts, TV commercials, product infomercials, etc. can be authored with hot spot data using the outlining and tracking functions described above for frames in digital or analog format. Since the hot spot N data is maintained logically 15 separate from the media content, it does not matter what form, signal or file format the media content is provided in or what operating system or multimedia platform it is run on, as long as each image frame of the media content can be addressed and coordinate positions within the given frame dimensions can be specified. Therefore, the current diversity of 20 media sources for generating and distributing media content can continue to be utilized in conjunction with the authoring of interactive functions as a post-production overlay to create heightened viewer interest and interactivity with media programs.

Although the invention has been described with reference to 25 the above-described embodiments and examples, it will be appreciated that many other variations, modifications, and applications may be devised in accordance with the broad principles of the invention disclosed herein. The invention, including the described embodiments and examples and all 30 related variations, modifications, and applications, is defined in the following claims.

Claims:

1. A system for allowing media content to be used in an
5 interactive media program wherein the media content in the form of data
representing a series of successive display frames (F_i) having respective
frame addresses ("Frame Data"), characterized by being combined with:

10 (i) object mapping data ("N Data") specifying frame addresses
and display location coordinates of objects (A, B) intended to be
interactive as they appear in the display frames of the media content;

15 (ii) linkages (IDM Prog.) provided through an interactive
media program connecting objects (A, B) whose frame addresses and display
location coordinates are specified by the N Data to respective other
functions to be performed upon user selection of the objects in the
display frames of the media content; and

20 (iii) a user system (32) for operating the interactive media
program in conjunction with displaying the media content by detecting
when an object appearing in one or more display frames is selected by a
user and performing the function linked by the program linkage thereto.

25

2. A system according to Claim 1, wherein the N Data
representing the display location coordinates and frame addresses of
mapped objects are maintained logically separate from the Frame Data for
the media content.

30

3. A system according to Claim 1, wherein the media content
is one selected from the group comprising a movie, music video, video
advertising, cable or television programming, and reference works.

35

4. A system according to Claim 1, wherein the linkages (IDM
Prog.) to the mapped objects in the media content are provided through
the interactive media program logically separate from the N Data for the
mapped objects.

40

5. A system according to Claim 1, wherein the user system
is a set-top box coupled to a television display at a subscriber location
which is connected to a network server through a transmission link.

6. A system according to Claim 5, wherein the user system

includes an optical pointing device (36) for pointing to a target area on the television display, and the set-top box includes a detector (33, 44) for detecting display location coordinates of a target on the television display pointed to by said pointing device.

5

7. A system according to Claim 1, wherein the user system includes means for stopping or pausing the displaying of media content upon selection of an object by the user.

10

8. A system for authoring an interactive media program in conjunction with media content using an editing subsystem for editing the media content in the form of data representing a series of successive display frames (F_i) having respective frame addresses ("Frame Data"), characterized by said editing subsystem having:

15

(i) an object mapping subsystem for generating object mapping data ("N Data") specifying frame addresses and display location coordinates of objects intended to be interactive as they appear in the display frames of the media content;

20

(ii) interactive media program development tools including a hyperlinking tool for establishing linkages (IDM Prog.) connecting objects (A, B) whose frame addresses and display location coordinates are specified by the N Data to functions to be performed upon user selection of the objects in the display frames of the media content; and

25

(iii) said object mapping subsystem having an object mapping tool for generating the display location coordinates for an object appearing in a display frame when an author marks the object as it appears in the display frame.

30

9. A system according to Claim 8, wherein said object mapping subsystem includes an object outlining tool for generating N Data specifying an object appearing in a display frame based upon an outline drawn around the object with a cursor or pointing device.

35

10. A system according to Claim 9, wherein said object mapping subsystem further includes an object motion tracking tool for detecting a path of an object in motion across a series of display frames and for generating N Data for the object for the series of display frames based upon an outline drawn around an object in one display frame by said object outlining tool and the path of motion of the object detected by

said object motion tracking tool.

11. A system according to Claim 1, further comprising:
 - (a) a network server connected to a plurality of subscriber terminals for providing interactive media program services to subscribers on the network system;
 - (b) the N Data for objects intended to be interactive in the media content being stored in a memory of the network server in association with the Frame Data for media content; and
 - 10 (c) said user system being constituted by each subscriber terminal having a console connected to a display and to the network system via a transmission link.

12. A network system according to Claim 11, wherein the media content is a movie, and Frame Data for the movie and N Data for designated objects appearing therein are transmitted from the network server to the subscriber terminal upon request.

13. A network system according to Claim 11, wherein the interactive media program is stored with the N Data and is also transmitted from the network server to the subscriber terminal upon request.

14. A network system according to Claim 11, wherein the subscriber terminal includes a remote control (36) having an optical pointer device and a pointer detection sensor (33, 44) for detecting the selection of an object by a subscriber using said pointer device.

15. A network system according to Claim 11 in the form of a cable TV network, wherein the subscriber terminal console is a cable converter box, the media content is a cable TV program, and N Data for designated objects appearing therein are transmitted from the network server to the subscriber terminal on a cable channel received by the subscriber terminal console.

35

16. A network system according to Claim 15, wherein the subscriber terminal console includes a keypad and means for generating a message to be transmitted back to the network server.

17. A network system according to Claim 15, wherein the subscriber terminal console includes a utility for storing interactive media program data and performing the interactive media program in conjunction with display of the media content.

5

18. An interactive media product comprising:

(a) a first component of media content in the form of data representing a series of successive display frames having respective frame addresses ("Frame Data"), and

10 (b) a second component of object mapping data ("N Data") specifying display location coordinates and frame addresses of designated objects appearing in the display frames of the media content,

15 wherein the first component of Frame Data for the media content is stored physically or logically separate from the second component of N Data for the designated objects.

19. A product according to Claim 18 in the form of a digital data storage disk (64) having a main sector (66a) where the first component of Frame Data is stored, and a separate sector (66b) where the 20 second component of N Data is stored.

20. A product according to Claim 18 in the form of a digital data storage disk (64) having the first component (66a) of Frame Data stored in an main area thereon relative to the separate area where the 25 second component (66b) of N Data is stored, such that the disk can be played on both systems for playback of non-interactive programs using only the Frame Data and systems for playing of interactive programs using the Frame Data and the N Data.

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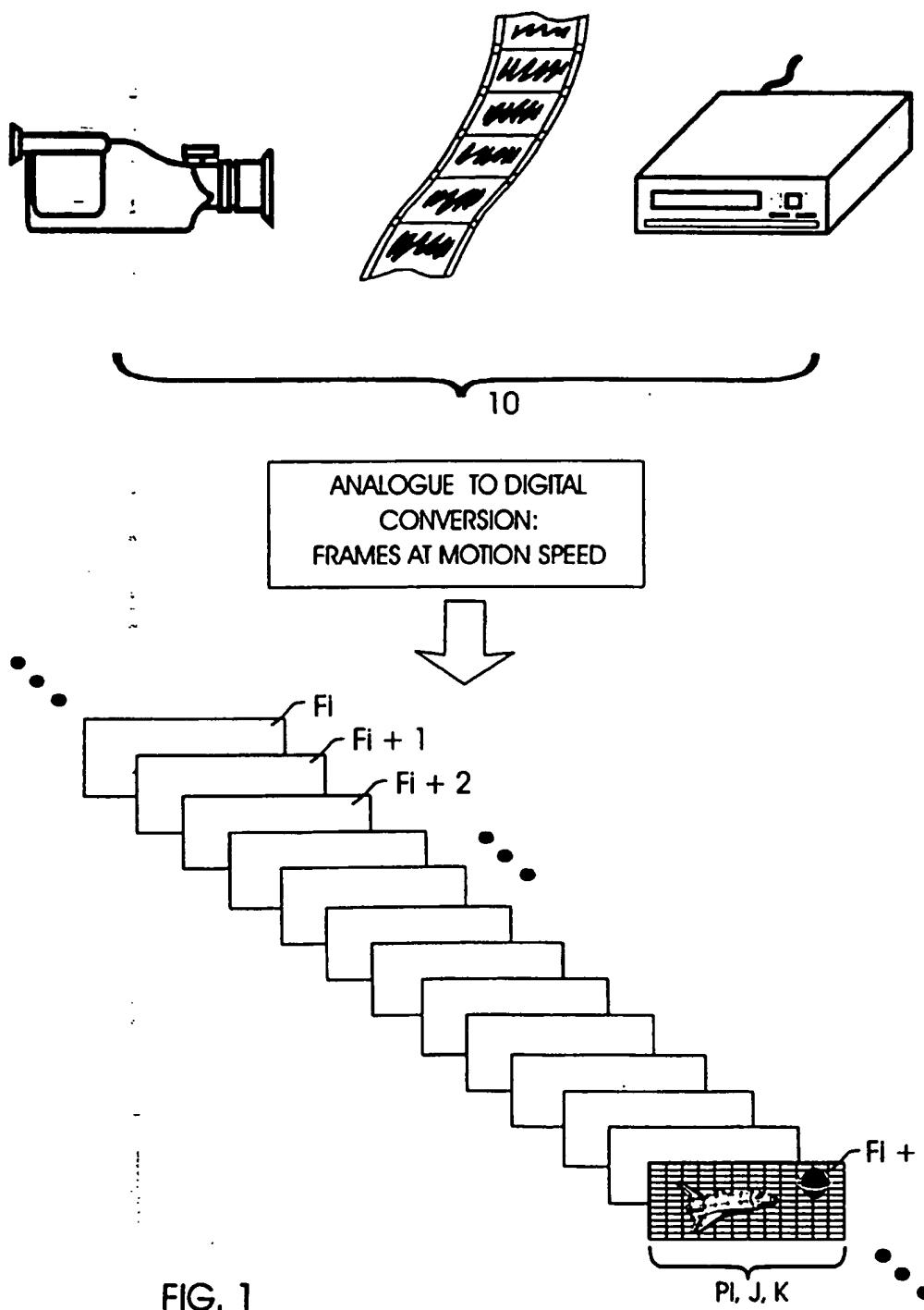
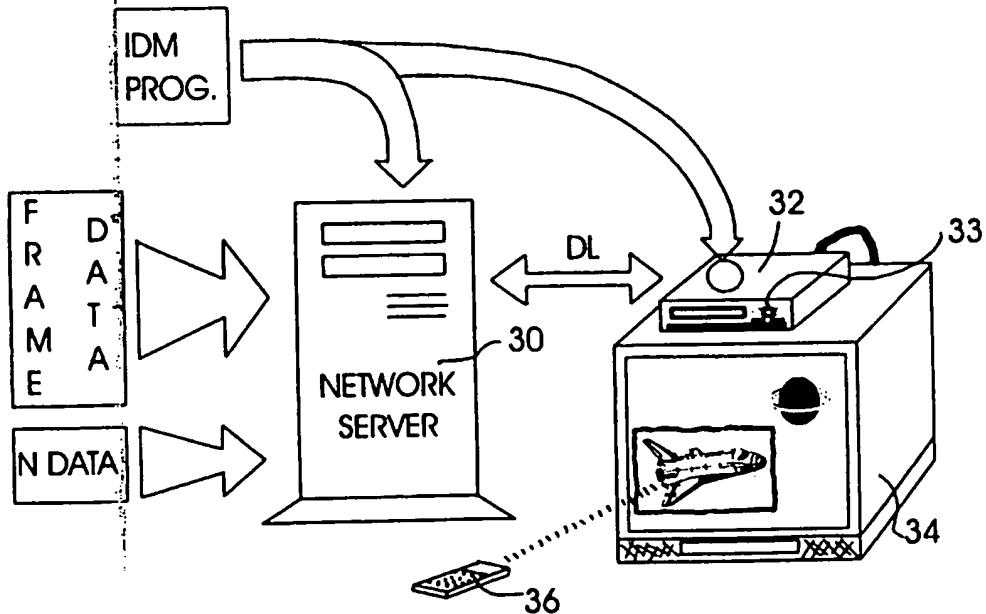
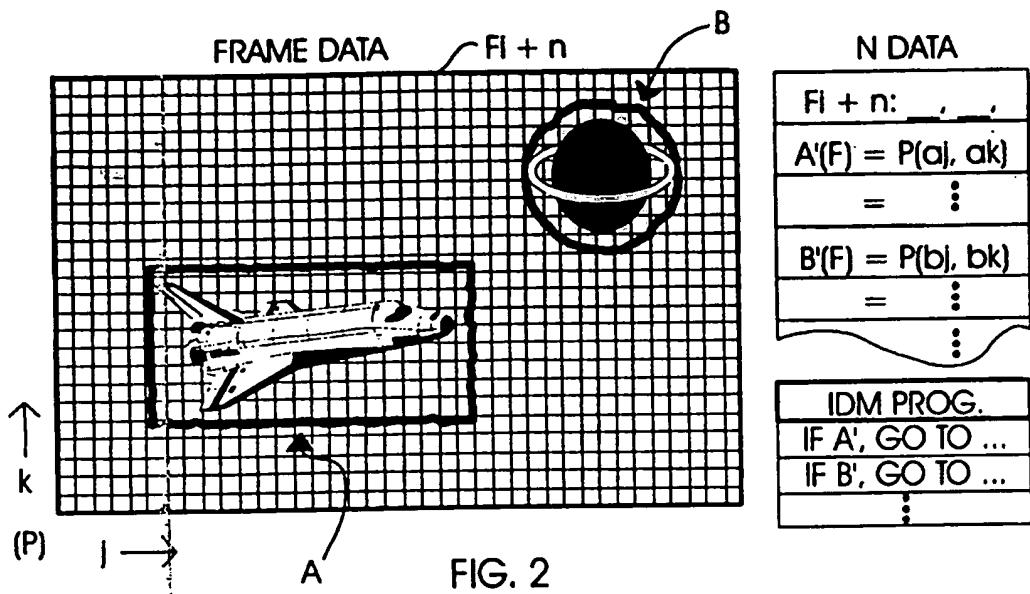


FIG. 1

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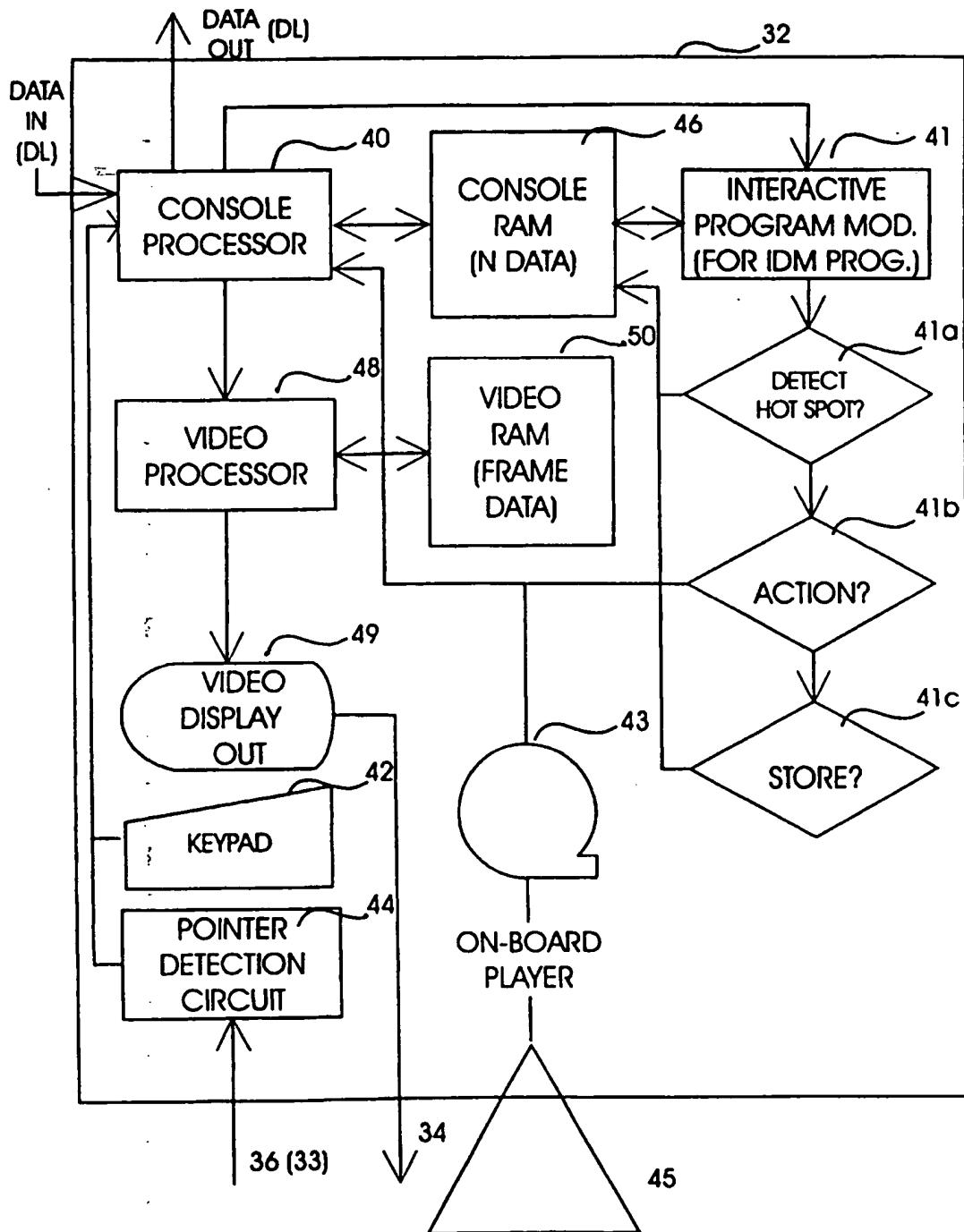
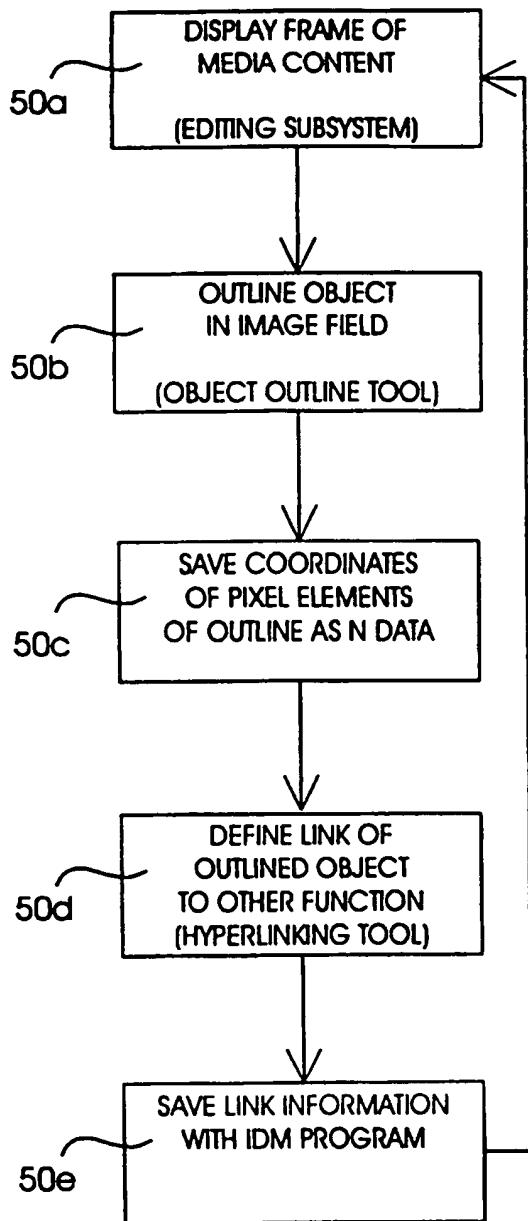


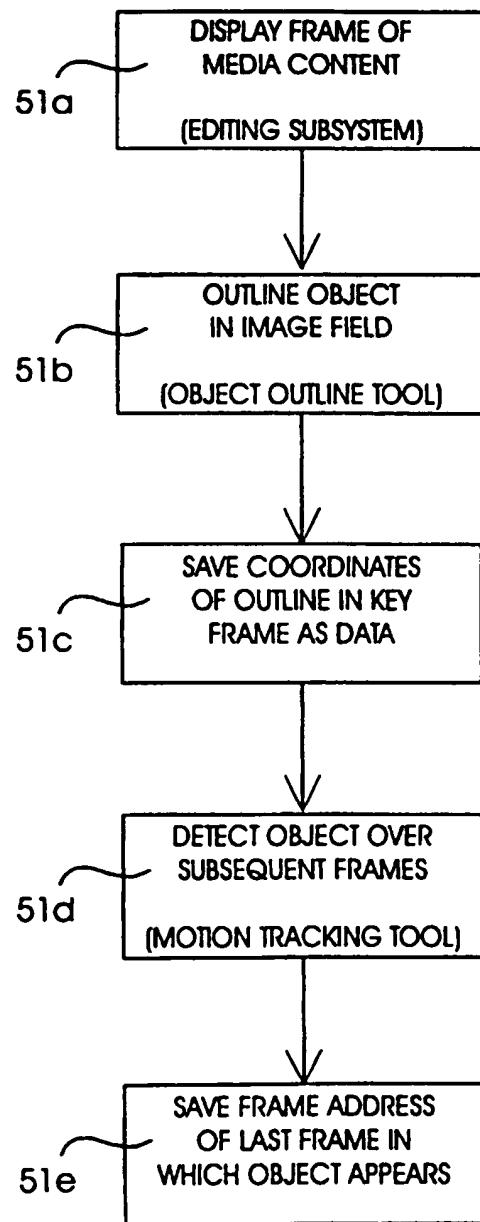
FIG.4

FIG. 5A



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FIG.5B



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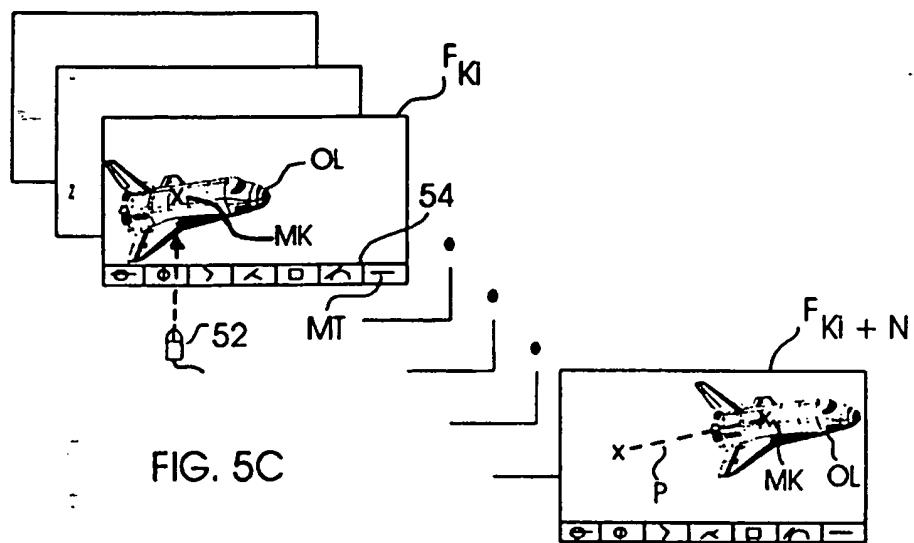


FIG. 5C

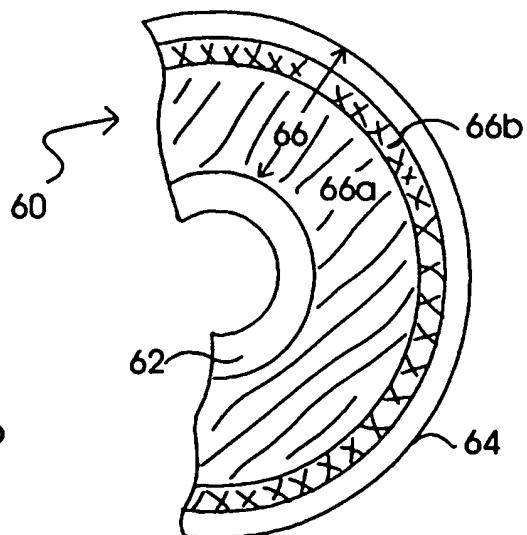


FIG. 6

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International application No.
PCT/US96/15437

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER

IPC(6) : G06T 1/00

US CL : 395/154, 152; 348/7, 10, 12, 20

According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC

B. FIELDS SEARCHED

Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)

U.S. : 395/154, 152, 155, 160; 348/7, 10, 12, 20; 345/121, 122, 158; 358/341, 342

Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched

Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practicable, search terms used)

APS on US patent database.

C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category*	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
X, P -----	US, A, 5,539,871 (GIBSON) 23 July 1996, col.3, lines 4, 20; col.4, lines 4-45; col.5, lines 2-5, 43-54; col.6, line 6; col.7, lines 20, 34.	1-17 ----- 18-20
Y	US, A, 5,065,345 (KNOWLES ET AL) 12 November 1991, col.6; lines 46-59; FIG.1	18-20
A	US, A, 5,109,482 (BOHRMAN) 28 April 1992.	1-20
A	US, A, 5,319,455 (HOARTY ET AL) 07 June 1994.	1-20
A	US, A, 5,204,947 (BERNSTEIN) 20 April 1993.	1-20

Further documents are listed in the continuation of Box C. See patent family annex.

• Special categories of cited documents:	
•A• document defining the general state of the art which is not considered to be part of particular relevance	•T• later document published after the international filing date or priority date and not in conflict with the application but cited to understand the principle or theory underlying the invention
•B• earlier document published on or after the international filing date	•X• document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered novel or cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is taken alone
•L• document which may throw doubt on priority claim(s) or which is cited to establish the publication date of another citation or other special reason (as specified)	•Y• document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is combined with one or more other such documents, such combination being obvious to a person skilled in the art
•O• document referring to an oral disclosure, use, exhibition or other means	•Z• document member of the same patent family
•P• document published prior to the international filing date but later than the priority date claimed	

Date of the actual completion of the international search	Date of mailing of the international search report
19 NOVEMBER 1996	23 DEC 1996

Name and mailing address of the ISA/US Commissioner of Patents and Trademarks Box PCT Washington, D.C. 20231 Facsimile No. (703) 305-3230	Authorized officer STEPHEN HONG Telephone No. (703) 308-5465	BRIAN A. HARDEN PARALEGAL SPECIALIST GROUP 2400
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Application No. 10/786,777
Attorney Docket No. 213187-00008

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In the Claims

1. (Currently Amended). An image processing system for processing video content in a sequence of video frames and linking one or more pixel objects embedded in said video content to selected data objects in a sequence of video frames, the image processing system comprising:
 - a video capture system for capturing a frame of said sequence of video frames to be viewed defining a captured video frame;
 - a user interface for enabling a user to select one or more pixel objects in said captured frame defining selected pixel objects;
 - a pixel object tracking system which includes a processor which automatically tracks said selected pixel objects in other frames;
 - a video linking system which generates one or more linked video files, separate from and not embedded in said video content, said linked video files identifying pixel objects by frame number and location within the frame and provide one or more links to predetermined data objects for each pixel object, wherein said linked video files are configured so that selected locations in said video frames by a pointing device during playback of the video can be linked with the data objects when said selected locations correspond to said pixel objects.
2. (Previously Presented). The system as recited in claim 1, wherein said data content has a predetermined playback rate and said video linking system samples said video content at a sample rate of less than said predetermined playback rate.
3. (Previously Presented). The system as recited in claim 2, wherein said sample rate is three (3) frames per second.
4. (Original). The system as recited in claim 1, wherein said video linking system is configured to identify segment breaks in said video content.
5. (Original). The system as recited in claim 4, wherein said segment breaks are determined by determining the median average pixel values for a series of frames and comparing changes in the pixel values relative to the median average and indicating a segment break when the change in pixel values represents at least a predetermined change relative to the median average.

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6. (Cancelled).
7. (Cancelled).
8. (Cancelled).
9. (Cancelled).
10. (Cancelled).
11. (Currently amended) The video playback image processing system as recited in claim 1 further including a video playback application for playing back video content and said linked video files, wherein said video playback application is configured to determine if selected locations by a pointing device during playback of the video content correspond to a said predetermined pixel object objects and provide a link to a data object when said selected location corresponds to one of said a predetermined pixel object objects object.
12. (Previously presented) The image processing system as recited in claim 1, wherein said pixel object tracking system automatically compensates for changes in the color values of a pixel object due to lighting changes.

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REMARKS

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Upon entry of the Amendment, Claims 1-5 and 11 and 12 are pending. Claims 1 and 11 have been amended to more particularly point out the invention. In as much as the Office Action is under final, a Request for Continuing Examination under 37 CFR § 1.114 is included herewith. It is respectfully submitted that upon entry of the amendment and consideration of the remarks below that the application is in condition for allowance.

CLAIM -OBJECTIONS

Claim 11 has been objected to as failing to further limit the subject matter of a previous claim. It is respectfully submitted that Claim 11 is dependent upon Claim 1As amended, Claim 11 recites an element not present in Claim 1; namely a video playback application. Claim 1 merely defines the linked video files in terms of playback. For these reasons, the Examiner is respectfully requested to reconsider and withdraw this objection.

CLAIM REJECTIONS - 35 U.S.C. § 103

Claim 1 has been rejected under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) as being unpatentable over Rangan, et al., U.S. Patent No. 6,198,833 ("the Rangan et al patent") in view of Feinleib US Patent No. 6,637,032 ("the Feinleib patent"). It is respectfully submitted that neither the Rangan, et al. patent nor Feinleib patent disclose or suggest the invention recited in amended claim 1. In particular, the Applicant agrees with the Examiner's assessment that the Rangan et al patent "fails to explicitly teach said video linking system generating one or more linked video files separate from said video content, being configured to identify the pixel objects by frame number and location within the frame." Office Action, mailed on October 30, 2006, page 4, lines 19-21. The Applicant further agrees that "Rangan does not explicitly teach information not embedded in video content." Office Action, mailed on October 30, 2006, page 5, lines 14-15. The Applicant also agrees that the Feinleib patent teaches embedding closed captioning script in the Vertical Blanking Interval of a video signal. The Examiner states on Page 5 that "VBI is not part of the video data and thus, Feinleib shows information such as captioning script can be stored in VBI

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(vertical blanking interval) and thus not embedded in video content.". The Applicant respectfully disagrees with such a characterization.

More particularly, it is respectfully submitted (and I am sure the Examiner will agree) that the VBI is part of a standard composite video signal, as generally described in Col. 3, lines 45-59 of the Feinlieb patent. As such, it is respectfully submitted that the VBI and the "video image data" (as the term is used in the Feinlieb patent) are part of single composite video signal. In other words, it is respectfully submitted that the VBI and the "video image data" are not sent as separate signals. Moreover, it also clear that any information contained in the VBI is embedded therein is already embedded when the signal is broadcast from the broadcast station or cable head end. More specifically, in the embodiment disclosed in the Feinlieb patent, the information is closed captioning script which may be selectively decoded by the television receiver or clients 22(1) ... 22(M) as illustrated in Fig. 1. Thus it should be clear that the "video image signal" and the VBI are broadcast together as part of a standard TV signal.

Based on the above, it is respectfully submitted that the closed captioning script is clearly embedded if not a part of the video content transmitted by the video content provider. As such the Feinlieb patent clearly does not disclose "linked video files" which are separate from and not embedded in the video content for several reasons. First, if the client, i.e devices 22(1)... 22(M), illustrated in Fig. 1 of the Feinlieb patent, activates its close captioning feature, all of the close captioning scripts will be displayed and thus become part of the video image ("The Television Decoding Circuitry Act of 1990 requires that all televisions made after 1993 of a size 13 inches or larger be equipped with closed captioning decoding circuitry.", the Feinlieb patent, Col. 3, line 66- Col. 4, line 2). Second, as mentioned above, information or data embedded in the VBI is "not separate from the video content as the term is used in the claims. As recited in the claims and defined in the specification, the linked video files are "created separately from the original content" Paragraph [0035] of the instant application. It is also pointed out that adding any type of information to a broadcast video signal even in the VBI requires an alteration of the video signal.

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albeit adding information to the VBI. Such alterations of broadcast video signals by third parties are not generally permitted by the video content owners. The present invention solves this problem by providing "linked video files" which does not require alteration in any way of the video content, i.e. broadcast video signal. As such, it is respectfully submitted that both the Rangan et al and Feinlieb patents teach away from an image processing system which generates linked video files which are separate and not embedded in the video content. Thirdly, the term "video content" as the term is used in the claims is defined by several examples which include "an on-demand source", such as the output from a DVD player as well as streaming video from video content producer. The Examiner's attention is directed to paragraph [0031] of the instant application. Both of these examples clearly relate to a composite video signal which includes the "video image information" + the VBI. It is respectfully submitted that the "linked video files" are separate from such video content. For all of the above reasons, the Examiner is respectfully requested to reconsider and withdraw the rejection of claim 1.

Claims 2 and 3 have been rejected under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) as being unpatentable over the Rangan, et al. patent and the Feinlieb patent further in view of the Vidovic, U.S. Patent No. 3,878,557. Claims 2 and 3 are dependent upon claim 1. The Rangan, et al. and Feinlieb patents have already been discussed. The Vidovic patent was cited for teaching a videotape recording apparatus which shows color frame pulses separated by 66 millihertz. The Vidovic patent otherwise does not disclose or suggest a video linking system, as recited in the claims, which generates video linking files which are separate from the video content as recited in the claims at issue. For these reasons and the above reasons, the Examiner is respectfully requested to reconsider and withdraw the rejection of claims 2 and 3.

Claims 4 and 5 have been rejected under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) as being unpatentable over the Rangan, et al. patent and the Feinlieb patent in view of Toklu, U.S. Patent No. 6,549,643.

Claims 4 and 5 are also dependent upon claim 1. The Rangan, et al. and Feinlieb patents have been discussed above. The Toklu patent was cited for teaching video summarization methods,

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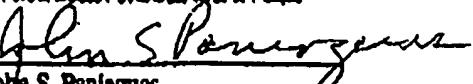
but does not otherwise disclose a video linking system which generates linked video files that are separate from the video content wherein the linked video files identify the frame and location within the frame of selectable pixel objects within each frame. For these reasons and the above reasons, the Examiner is respectfully requested to reconsider and withdraw the rejection of claims 4 and 5.

Claim 12 has been rejected under 35 U.S.C. 103(a) as being unpatentable over the Rangan, et al. patent and the Feinleib patent in view of Hunke U.S. Patent No. 5,912,980 ("the Hunke patent"). Claim 12 is dependent upon claim 1. The Rangan, et al. and Feinleib patents have been discussed above. The Hunke patent was cited for teaching an image processing system that compensates for lighting changes. It does not otherwise disclose a video linking system, as recited in the claims, which generates linked video files that are separate from the video content wherein the linked video files identify the frame and location within the frame of selectable pixel objects within each frame. For these reasons and the above reasons, the Examiner is respectfully requested to reconsider and withdraw the rejection of claim 12.

Respectfully submitted,

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